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How Do We Help Executives and Managers Learn the New Mindset?

Premise

It is often hard to get managers and executives take the time to learn about an agile transformation in a serious way. I am a firm believer in the idea that "the performance of work is the result of the system" and "management is responsible for the system". But as said, we find ourselves in a situation where many do not understand the significant shift that will be required (see What Are The Changes in Management Approach That Need To Happen with Agile? for more ideas here).

Discussion

One of the problems I've found is that, as coaches, we tend to say things "you need to learn about agile (or Cost of Delay or servant leadership or ...). This is all true but is also often not a useful way to get people interested in what you are "selling". In many cases the people we are talking to already feel like they are doing whatever the new buzzword is based on their interpretation of the buzzword ("I am a servant leader - I delegate all the time"). The other problem is that there is an implied viewpoint that whatever it is that managers already know that is somehow not useful any more. Not only is that not true, but lets face it you don't convince people to head in a particular direction by telling them that they are "wrong" and that all their thinking, which lead to all their success so far, is not the way to think in the future.

For this reason I have found it is sometimes better to work a series of workshops as a series of business problems that we want to address, and so avoid not only the buzzword jargon, but also focus on improvement which most reasonable people are interested in pursuing. These subjects become a vehicle for the agile subjects we then want to address.

Here are some examples of the approach:

Filter:

Business Problem	Subjects We'd Address
How do teams manage their work?	Demo of the board (and any tooling). Use cases such as "at the daily meeting", "break in work during the day", "using metrics at a retrospective"
How do we improve efficiency?	Cover Resource vs flow efficiency. Sources of waste in IT projects. Focus. Managing WIP. Sometimes big changes required (natural velocity of a process?)

Business Problem	Subjects We'd Address
How do we (management) help teams become more effective?	Cover servant leadership, engagement, gemba, decentralized decision making, developing the system / culture, the purpose / mastery / self-directed discussion. Shield the team from outside influences. Also helping managers (over-)communicate. Collaboration techniques.
How do we coordinate and align the activities of multiple teams?	Introduction to elements of SAFe, PI Planning, for example, or other scaling approaches
How do we rollout agile to the organization?	Cover rollout plan, lessons learned from pilots. Structured approach to approach, and specific activities (proven patterns)
How can we improve our understanding of who are customers are and what they want?	Cover value stream mapping. Personas etc. perhaps before work breakdown as need that orientation. Context diagrams (goes into / goes out of)
How do we breakdown work?	Cover value vs task orientation. Requirements model. Flow of work - epics to features to stories
How do we budget and forecast cost, completion date?	Estimation, key metrics, using points (or cycle time) / prioritized backlog, feature / epic progress based on completion, drivers for forecasting (e.g. Scope expansion, defect recycle, dependencies)
How will we need to change our (project) governance approach?	Now that we understand changes in forecasting model, breakdown structure what impact does it have on our governance model
How do current organizational roles work in the new environment?	Basic role mapping
Why do we need to change our approach to work? (Maybe too esoteric).	Speed of change; Cynafin understanding.

Want to Know More?

By way of background, "Leading SAFe" has the following sections.

- Introducing SAFe
- / Embracing Lean-Agile Mindset
  - House of Lean
  - Agile Manifesto
- / Understanding SAFe principles
  - Take the economic view
  - Apply systems thinking
  - Assume variability, preserve options
  - Build incrementally with fast, integrated learning cycles
  - Base milestones on objective evaluation of working systems
  - Visualize and limit WIP, reduce batch sizes, and manage queue lengths
  - Apply cadence, synchronize with cross domain planning
  - Unlock the intrinsic motivation of knowledge workers

  - ○ Decentralize decision making
- / Implementing an Agile Release Train
- Experience PI Planning
- / Executing and Releasing Value (Program level – perhaps more for L4?))
  - ○ Develop Vision, Roadmap, Program Backlog
  - ○ Prioritize the Program Backlog
  - ○ Execute the iterations of the Program Increment
  - ○ Execute the Program Increment
  - ○ Improve performance with Inspect and Adapt
  - ○ Release value on demand
- / Building an Agile Portfolio
  - ○ Define strategic themes for a portfolio
  - ○ Identify portfolio value streams
  - ○ Portfolio Epics
  - ○ Transition from project cost accounting to lean-agile budgeting
  - ○ Forecast Epics on near term Roadmap
- Building Really Big systems
- Leading the Lean-Agile Enterprise (get the feeling this is what the learning program is)

In other words, "Leading SAFe" has a good % of content that is relevant.

FAQ, Management, Culture, Workshops